ORIGINAL SERMONS,

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By the Rev. Theop^{s}. J. St. John, LL.B.

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An earnest Exhortation to the Sacrament—The Sabbath—Brotherly Love—A Death unto Sin. On the Intercession—Duty of Parents to Children. Minister and People—The Sufferings of Christ—Love of God—A Post Communion Sermon—Compassion—Honesty—Paul before Felix—Repentance—Preparation for the Sacrament—Family Worship—Education of the Poor—Swearing—Devout Observance of Sunday—Resignation—Drunkenness—Nativity—Last Sunday in the Year—First Sunday in the Year—Resurrection—Descent of the Holy Ghost—God the Architect of Nature—Exhortation to attend public worship—Devout Behaviour in Church—Sunday or Charity Schools—

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On the Creation—Redemption—Divine Authority of the Scriptures—Duty of proving and holding fast the faith of the Gospel—The terror and consolation of the Gospel—Death—Christ the Judge—Joseph and his Brethren—Sickness—Afflictions—Man's fall and restoration—Conscience—Censure—Day of Judgment—On the Precepts of the Gospel—Abraham offering up Isaac—Dives and Lazarus—Good Samaritan—Nature of New-Birth—On the Entrance to a Cure—Charity—Loss of the Soul.

Extract of a Letter from a Dignitary to his Nephew.

On my return to ——— I found my Congregation and Communicants prodigiously increased, my Curate had used St. John's MSS. Sermons, with which my Parishioners are much pleased, and, I hope, improved. They are wrote upon the Plan recommended by Dr. Blair in his Lectures; the conclusions are in general so very pathetic and persuasive, that they scarce can fail of producing a good effect.

No. 43. On Censure.

Matthew 7th Chap. 1st Verse.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

To censure the conduct of others is so agreeable to the pride and partiality of our corrupt nature, and so insinuates itself into the customs and fashions of the world, that it is the duty of every minister of the Gospel to guard his hearers against it.

I shall therefore beg your attention, whilst I make such reflections on this subject as may serve as an admonition to those who are guilty of this vice, and a persuasive to others not to offend the Almighty by the commission of it.

First, let us not censure others from appearances, "He who did no sin, in whose spirit there was "no guile," could not escape unjust imputations; much less can the best of sinful men, whose intentions are often mixed, and not infrequently erroneous, whose actions at the best are defective, be secure against this "pestilence that walketh in darkness." Vicious minds

will always give an unbounded licence to this censo-rious humour; and for want of better employment, or of charity, or out of impertinent curiosity, will pre-tend to fathom the greatest depths of thought, to dis-cover every spring and motive upon which any action turns, or rather give it what turn they please, by wresting it to such interpretations as may serve their present purpose. Hence it very often happens that men lay to one another's charge such designs in mat-ters of fact, and in matters of opinion, such consequences as were never intended. And what is still worse, the unwary part of mankind (who see no farther than the surface of things) are drawn in to take part with their accusers, to admit conjectures for evident proofs, and to ground the heaviest censures upon the least information.

But such a proceeding is equally void of justice and charity. The person who lies under this private judgment is certainly a more competent judge of his own actions than can be presumed of any other man.

"What man," says St. Paul, "knows the things of "a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him?" The limits of human knowlege are only the bare appearances of actions, so that until we know men's hearts, we are but imperfect judges of their intentions. But this injustice extends further to God, the Judge of all, who searcheth the heart and knoweth all things. This knowlege, with respect to our designs and actions, is as the sun to this lower world, "nothing is hid "from the light thereof." This knowlege then "is "too wonderful and excellent for us, we cannot attain "unto it:" to assume therefore the judgment-seat is to assume a province which is not ours, and which we are not able to maintain; and it will therefore be the highest injustice, as well as the greatest folly and presumption, to arrogate that to ourselves which is the sole right of Him to whom all secret things belong.

He who "was the wisdom and power of God," would not assume this judgment in His mortal capacity. He who "knew what was in man, and

" needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man——to whom " the Father had committed all judgment." declares that He would not exerciſe that commiſſion on earth. " I judge no man," ſays our Saviour; referring the exerciſe of that power to His ſecond coming, " when God " ſhall judge the ſecrets of men's hearts by Jeſus Chriſt."

But as this raſh judging is contrary to that example we are to imitate, ſo it is directly oppoſite to the genius and ſpirit of our Religion, which engages all who call themſelves Chriſtians to put the moſt candid interpretations upon the deſigns and actions of men. It is contrary to that rule of charity which enjoins us to love our neighbor as ourſelves, and whoſe peculiar property it is even " to think no evil."

And here let us beware of paſsing cenſure from the report of others.

Such, alas! is the unhappy proneneſs of our nature, to believe the worſt of each other, that nothing is more common than to obſerve ſome perſons not over credulous in other caſes, very eaſily inclined to believe

all they hear to the disadvantage of others. Censure commonly meets with a favourable hearing: it is from this, when discourse is at a stand, that conversation finds relief; especially when it is accompanied with a sprightly turn of thought, with pointed language, and a refined way of exposing. And it is generally observable, that those who are the aptest to be imposed on by false reports, are the forwardest to spread them. False reports, like false coin, are put off by the Receiver with more haste than the true, and usually with more concern for their currency. And many who would not venture to stamp these counterfeit pieces will not scruple to pass them away at any rate. Many will make a conscience of telling a scandalous story of their own invention, but none of reporting, or at least believing it on the single testimony or base surmize of another. Weak judgments, like weak eyes, trust to such appearances as never shew the object in its real proportion. By such arts men of turbulent tempers and bad designs infuse not only their own ill

thoughts, but such as they are willing to suggest into the minds of others. They set men's actions in such lights, and disguise them with such colors, as is most agreeable to their present humour; and create such jealousies and suspicions, such factions and animosities, as not only disturb the quiet and wound the reputation of particular persons, but sow the seeds of strife and dissention in families and societies.

These are the fatal consequences when rumour is allowed to pass for evidence, and every one that hears it for a judge. But how contrary is this method of judging to the rules or forms of common justice? "Does our law condemn any man," says Nicodemus, on this occasion, "before it hear him and "know what he doeth?" Shall our ears be open to calumnies and accusations, to all that envy or malice can invent, that passion or prejudice can suggest? Must they be deaf to justice and mercy to all that truth and equity can alledge—to all that candour and charity can plead in vindication of injured Innocence?

From what has been said let us be perſuaded not to entertain ſuch eaſy thoughts concerning the guilt of this practice, that we may the better avoid it. Let thoſe who are unqualified for this office, either through pride, ignorance, self-love or partiality, and at the same time uſurp it, be examples to us how incompetent judges moſt men are of thoſe appearances by which they affect to judge. Let that cloud of witneſses convince us of our own incapacity.

Let us diveſt ourſelves of that falſe and unreaſonable fondneſs of our own ſagacity which makes us take all we ſee for evidence, and all we imagine for demonſtration. Let us ſuppreſs that prejudice and malignity which perhaps were built upon one raſh judgment, but afterwards become the foundation of many; which eaſily induce men of this temper to think they ſee thoſe errors they would be glad to find; and to aggravate all they ſee beyond all the meaſures of truth and juſtice.

Let us wean ourſelves of that partiality whereby,

as St. James observes, "we become judges of evil "thoughts"—making distinctions where there is no real difference, preferring some and despising others with regard to our present humour or inclination, or to the party and interest we espouse.

Let us restrain that rashness and precipitation which make us so forward to judge of persons and things at first sight; let us rather accustom ourselves to a slower pace in our determinations.

If we will be swift to hear let us be slow to speak, and allow ourselves time to consider what seems to be most evident, that by these means we fall into a greater degree of reservedness and caution. Where things are doubtful and uncertain, let us clothe ourselves with that candour and integrity, that justice and impartiality which are requisites to the exercise of that righteous judgment recommended by our Saviour; and "above all, let us put on charity which "is the bond of perfectness; which thinketh, which "hopeth all things;" which is so far from observing,

that "it covers a multitude of sins"—either by overlooking those "appearances of evil" which offer themselves to our view, or by concealing them from the sight of others.

Lastly. As we find by observation that the most unblameable innocence is no defence against rash censure which the world will fix under some pretence or other upon the best of actions, let it be our endeavour to avoid "the very appearance of evil." Let us approve ourselves to God and our own consciences; let this be our first aim. In the next place, let us be careful how we stand in the opinion of the world; a fair reputation is of great value and advantage, as it is subservient to the interest of virtue and the cause of Religion. To be unconcerned about what others think of us is the property of an arrogant mind. It is something worse when the contrary is a christian duty. Let those in a particular manner, whose office and station set their actions in a more conspicuous light, take heed to themselves, and above

others "be careful to maintain good works." It is from them that men of an inferior class form their conduct and direct their steps, and therefore their example will have more weight and influence. Let it then be their especial care to keep a conscience void of offence towards God; for this will be the most effectual way of obtaining a good report amongst men, and therefore others, by seeing their good works, may be induced to follow their example. But if, after a constant perseverance in well-doing, we are not able to put to silence malicious and rash-judging men, let us not be discouraged from the practice of our duty; let us still dare to be what we know we ought to be. "For if we suffer for well-doing, happy are we, "inasmuch as we are made partakers of Christ's "sufferings." Let us imitate that glorious example of patience and fortitude, who "overcame evil with "good; who, when He was reviled, reviled not "again; when He suffered, threatened not." Let us follow the example of those who are gone before us,

who, under these and greater hardships from rash judgments and malicious accusations, committed themselves to Him who judgeth righteously—who in the great day of appearance will discover what we have been, when the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light, and the councels of the heart made manifest; then will wisdom be justified of her children, and every good man have praise of God.

'That we may have this end always in view, 'and in all our thoughts, our words, and actions 'may be influenced by the desire of approving ourselves 'to God, we beseech Thee, heavenly Father, who art 'the giver of every good gift, that, as the way of man 'is not in himself; as it is not in man that walketh 'to direct his steps aright, Thou wouldst be graciously 'pleased to influence us by Thy Holy Spirit, and 'preserve us from every evil way that may either en'danger our own souls, or give occasion to others to 'speak evil of us. Impress our hearts with the re'flection that we are mortal and accountable creatures,

'that we live under a dispensation derived from Thy-
'self, and delivered by thine only Son—that it is a
'rule of conduct Thou expectest us to observe—and that,
'according to our observance or transgression of it, Thou
'wilt reward or punish us. Let us pay such regard
'to our behaviour as to stop the mouth of calumny,
'and to bridle the tongue of censure. And, for the
'peace and comfort of the world, may it please Thee to
'make all those who are continually prying into the con-
'duct of others more attentive to their own. Instead of
'inventing falsehoods or uttering malicious reports, may
'they consider that every man is one day to give ac-
'count of himself to God! May we all henceforth cease
'to judge, that we ourselves may not be judged of the
'Lord; always remembering the admonition of the
'Apostle, why dost thou set at nought thy brother, or
'why dost thou judge thy brother, shall we not all
'stand before the judgment-seat of Christ!'

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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